



STATE OF WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY, TRADE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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November 30, 2004

The Honorable Sandra Romero, Chair
House Local Government Committee
Washington State House of Representatives
Mod 1 Building – Room 106
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

The Honorable Joyce Mulliken, Chair
Senate Land Use and Planning Committee
Washington State Senate
109A Newhouse Building
PO Box 40413
Olympia, WA 98504-0413

Dear Representative Romero and Senator Mulliken:

Agriculture plays a significant role in the history, culture and economy of Washington State. Conserving agricultural resource lands and maintaining and enhancing the agricultural industry comprise one of the goals of the Growth Management Act (GMA.) I am pleased to present to the Legislature and to the Governor a study conducted by the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED) of the experience of conserving agricultural lands, *Designation of Agricultural Lands in Chelan, King, Lewis, and Yakima Counties*.

CTED was charged by the 2004 Legislature in Senate Bill 6488 to conduct a study of the designation of agricultural lands with long-term commercial significance in four counties (King, Chelan, Lewis, and Yakima.) The study is due to the Legislature on December 1, 2004. Study topics include:

- Data: Acres designated agriculture, acres in agriculture operations, changes in agricultural land since 1990, and acres of land in other uses.
- Designation standards and procedures.
- Effect of designation on tax revenue.
- Contribution of agriculture to the local economy.
- Threats to maintaining the agriculture land base.
- Measures local governments should adopt to maintain the agricultural land base and enhance the agricultural industry.

CTED worked with five advisory committees, consulted people in the agriculture community, and reviewed reports and studies related to agriculture to develop the information and recommendations included in this report.

The study finds that designation of agriculture land under the GMA plays a significant role in the conservation of this land. Land that is designated agriculture cannot be converted to intense, non-agriculture uses such as subdivisions or commercial development. However, the designation of agriculture lands does not ensure the viability of the agricultural industry. Almost 60% of farms in Washington suffered losses in 2002.

As directed, the study identifies threats to maintaining the agriculture land base and measures local (and state) governments should adopt to maintain the agricultural land base and enhance the agricultural industry. The suggested measures generally include financial support to farmers and the agriculture industry, program support for expanded marketing efforts, and assistance in responding to the changing agriculture marketplace. Planning and regulatory measures address right-to-farm laws, transfer of development rights, and accessory uses. Some of the measures, such as reducing development pressure on agricultural land by actively promoting that most new development occur within urban growth areas, require no further study or authority for local governments to implement. Others need further evaluation. Recommendations for further study are included.

Thank you for your interest in agricultural lands issues and their importance to the state. Copies of the study may also be viewed on the CTED web site at <http://www.cted.wa.gov/growth/aglandsstudy>. Please contact Leonard Bauer at (360) 725-3055 or e-mail to leonardb@cted.wa.gov, if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Juli Wilkerson
Director

Enclosure

cc: House Local Government Committee
Senate Land Use and Planning Committee
Ron Shultz, Office of Financial Management
Members of CTED Agricultural Lands Study Advisory Committees